

Know Your Family Tree: Turning Points in Church History

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[0 : 00] Friends, good morning. It's wonderful to have the invitation to speak at Adolf Sunday School again. The last time I spoke here in the mornings at Adolf Sunday School, I think it was 2018, when one of the last times I was on the baton.

My name's Rhys and I teach at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. It's an Anglican Theological College. We call it, you'd call it a seminary. And I teach chiefly church history, but have some other responsibilities on the side.

And because Australians are so lousy in thinking about history, I do this talk so often, which is trying to give people a bit of a handle on 2,000 years.

It's ambitious and it will be slightly naive, but nonetheless really important. Let me just get some handle on what the Lord has done over this extended period of time.

So let me pray for us. We praise you, God, Father, Son and Spirit, for this wonderful hour together, that we might learn and think and grow and understand a little better how we might serve you in the world.

[1 : 25] So please, in all our words, in our thinking, in our speaking and listening, may we honour you for Christ's sake. Amen.

Amen. Well, there's a hangout in front of you with three columns, effectively. Each of those columns represents a significant moment in church history.

Now, I could have added other columns. You might note there's no medieval column, for example. That is a function more or less of the fact that I teach three history units at Ridley, Early Church, Reformation Church, and Modern Evangelicalism.

So I don't teach a unit of medieval history. So the limitations of this handout or of this session are a function of the limitations of my own teaching and competencies.

What I want to do is to introduce you to each of those three periods and show how each of those three periods is like and dislike the periods preceding.

[2 : 33] And that way we can kind of get a picture of how church history has developed in the course of the last 2,000 years. So, for example, we want to look at the early church, roughly speaking, the first 500 years.

In that period, the chief debate was about who is God, who is Christ. So, if you will, the doctrine that was chiefly debated was the doctrines of God and Christ.

Of course, they talked about any number of other things. That goes without saying. But nonetheless, when they talked about those other things, they realised that to have an answer to those other questions, they first of all had an answer to the question, who is God, who is Christ.

And then you could work out the others. They kept being forced back to that really fundamental concern. They were talking about who is God, the doctrine of the Trinity, who is Christ, how can this man, Jesus Christ, be the second person of the Trinity?

So, the great distinctive that they highlighted was how Christ can be with us. Emmanuel, God with us.

[3 : 53] How can the second person of the Trinity be amongst us, walk with us, die for us? So, when they talked about any number of things, they kept coming back to this core belief, Christ with us.

This core distinctive. How Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, could walk this earth with us.

And when they settled these debates, they summarised their conversations through a number of different creeds. And you might know some, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or perhaps the Affirmation Creed.

In those creeds, you'll notice that there's no mention of the word grace. There's no mention of the word atonement. There's lots of words that we would use that don't appear.

They're mainly about Christ and Christ who is with us. Not that they didn't believe in the atonement, and not that they didn't believe in the Holy Spirit, but nonetheless, their debates were circling around this kind of core idea.

[5 : 10] They wrote creeds to summarise those debates and to defend those insights. If you agree with the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or the Affirmation Creed, for that matter, you can describe yourself as Orthodox or Catholic.

That doesn't mean Greek or Russian Orthodox. That doesn't mean Roman Catholic. These are words that just describe your commitment to the creeds.

So I can describe myself as an Orthodox Christian. I'm in no sense Greek. I can describe myself as a Catholic Christian, but I'm in no sense Roman Catholic. But I describe myself in these terms because I will heartily affirm the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed in church, or elsewhere, that matter.

This is also an unusual period because in this moment, in these first 500 years, Christians went from being a persecuted minority to having legal status in the Roman Empire.

So this was the beginning of what we might name Christendom, where church and state are working together for the common good. Previously, the state, the Roman Emperor, believed that the church didn't represent the common good, and therefore they must be persecuted and minimised.

[6 : 35] But there came a point in the beginning of the 4th century when the Emperor said, no, you know what? I think they are no longer a threat to the state. We will work with them. At least initially, the church was given some legal status like their own buildings and you didn't have to be fed to the lions and you misbehaved anymore.

So this was, crudely put, the way the first 500 years of church history operated. The early church, or some people might describe it as the patristic period.

I'm going to pause now, take that sip of water, and ask if you have any thoughts, comments, follow-up questions. There are no dumb questions, right? There are just dumb answers.

So you should feel free to ask whatever you want to ask. If there's things here, and of course, it's racing through this, so if people who know something about the early church might find 3,000 holes in what I've just said.

Brother? I thought the distinction between Orthodox and Catholic came in the 11th century. Yeah, so that is true when you use those words to describe denominations, but those words are commonly referred to, commonly used to describe a commitment to the creeds.

[8 : 00] So you're correct. The word Catholic was used very early on. The word Orthodox was used very early on. But they weren't words being used to describe the difference between the Roman church and the Greek church.

What was the difference in this time period? There was hardly a difference in this time period. Yeah, yeah. So Catholic means according to the whole, and the Catholic position was that if you belong to the majority church, if you can say the creeds, if you can't say the creeds, you're a schismatic.

You don't belong to the majority church or the whole church. I think that's a question Yeah, so if at this time the focus was on this defence of Christ with us, does that mean there was very little discussion of the doctrines of grace and spirit, or they were just secondary?

Yes. They were accepted facts, or how did they understand those things? Yes, of course. Because we know today you can't live with just one. You need all three to degree your faith.

So they were talking about grace and the spirit all the time. Okay. But to answer their questions about grace and the spirit, they had to push deeper and kept coming back to the question, you can only define grace if you first understood who Christ is with us, how the second person of the Trinity can walk this earth.

[9 : 32] but that's kind of the concrete foundation. So it's not that they didn't have the questions, they didn't ignore the questions, but they kept saying, well, if we want to answer that question, perhaps there's a prior question and we still need to work out who Jesus is before we can work out who Jesus was who sent the spirit according to Acts 2.

There's a back question. Yes. We may be stepping way out of bounds, but a little bit about the text and the development of the text and how it was passed down in those first 500 years.

Yes, thank you. You mean text of the Bible? Correct. Documentation, a little bit, maybe a little bit about the languages that were used because we were in Europe, et cetera. Yeah, sure, sure.

Is it even possible to squeeze it in in 30 seconds? So give me 35. So in the first 100 years or so, the texts, Colossians, Matthew, whatever, were circulating more or less independently and then churches started accumulating or copying the texts that were circulating independently.

So one church just had Colossians and one church had Romans. They swapped them. Now each church has Colossians and Romans, right? So it took about 100 years and then the list of books that belonged in the New Testament became pretty settled.

[11 : 04] by about the year 180. But there was still some further debate whether two Peter and Jude belonged. But it was a slow process over the first couple hundred years.

So for years I've described myself as Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, sometimes plain vanilla Protestant, and evangelical, depending on who I'm talking Yeah, sure, sure.

And nevertheless, I have some quibbles with the creeds, even the Apostles' Creed. For our church history class we've been reading Pusto Gonzalez's book The Story of Christianity, right?

So in the chapter I'm reading he reproduces some version of awe, the old Roman creed, right? And I found myself writing yes, yes, yes, next to his English statement of the creed.

But I can't write that quite with the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed or the Athenation. Yes, I see. So the creeds... So my question is, am I still justifying calling myself a Catholic?

[12 : 19] And I'm not. Yeah, sure. The creeds aren't the scriptures. So you're allowed to disagree with the creeds. There are some quibbles around the edges about what in the creeds we might easily or with more difficulty ascend to.

But that aside, I still think the chief way we use the word Catholic and Orthodox is to describe our commitment to creed or Christianity, the big tradition that begins with that discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Yeah, so people might quibble or try and work out what it means that Christ ascended to hell or Christ ascended to the dead. That might be a classic debate amongst Christians what they're doing.

Well, this is great. These are the questions about the early church. Just let's get to the Reformation. We'll see how many questions we have here. So the early church, the first 500 years, discussed the doctrines of God and Christ.

They summarised their debates with the language of Christ with us. They wrote them down or they captured them in the Apostles of Nicene or Athanasian Creed.

[13 : 35] and if you can agree with them in substantial amounts, you can call yourself an Orthodox Christian or a Catholic Christian. It was the beginning of Christendom.

But a thousand years later, Christians in the West started finding difficulties with the way the medieval church was doing its ministry and explaining its theology.

So the medieval church had become a place where grace was seen as a substance, something that you could trade, something you could buy or sell, something that you could participate in if a priest of the church performed the sacraments.

grace somehow seemed a commodity that you could provide exchange for. The story of how the Western church got to that place, of course, is a long and complicated one.

If you have a certain view of grace that it's a commodity, you'll think the church is a place of exchange. What you think of grace shapes what you think the church is for.

[14 : 59] If you think grace is a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, or if you think grace is the personal presence of the Lord, you'll think the church is a place where you're encouraged to personally meet the Lord.

But if you think grace is a substance, not personal, impersonal, something you can exchange, then you'll think the church is a place of exchange. What you do with grace impacts what you think the church is for.

So the reformers of the 16th century, they had no problem with the left-hand column.

The reformers believed in the doctrine of the Trinity and Christ, the second verse of the Trinity, walking this earth in a body. They believed that Christ is with us.

They upheld the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Affirmation Creed. They had no problem using the word orthodox or Catholic to describe themselves. But now they're trying to tweak, they're trying to adjust, they're trying to rethink one particular thing, though it will have big implications.

[16 : 09] They're trying to think more carefully about what grace is and therefore what the church is for. And you'd know that one of the great doctrines that the reformers decided to hold on to in a certain way of being taught was the doctrine of justification.

We often say justification by faith. Actually the phrase is justification by grace through faith. justification is a way of describing grace, that you can't merit it, that you can't achieve it, that you can't do anything that would earn it.

The reformers held on to the slogan Christ for us in our place, taking our penalty.

justification. It wasn't that they were giving up on Christ with us, that was a given, like that wasn't even debated. No, it's a much narrower set of concerns now concerning grace in the church and they summarise that under the slogan Christ for us or in explaining teaching, writing about the doctrine of justification, justification by grace through faith.

So if you will, the early church provided a broad pedestal and now the reformers are standing on that pedestal, they're a bit higher up and they're building another layer, another floor, another story.

[17 : 48] It's not quite as wide as the first layer, but it builds taller. And they decided to summarise this teaching about Christ for us in confessions of faith.

These are not creeds. They believe the creeds, they agree with the creeds, they have held the creeds. Now this is an addition to the creeds. These are confessions of faith which are trying to more particularly describe what grace is and what the church is for.

So they wrote the Augsburg confession, if you are more Lutheran, the Heidelberg confession, if you are more reformed, the Schleithem confession, if you're more Baptist, the 39 articles, if you're an Anglican Protestant.

These were statements effectively, not in time, but effectively about the nature of grace and the nature of the church. So if you can agree with the Augsburg confession or the Heidelberg confession, you can describe yourself as a Lutheran Protestant or Reformed Protestant or Anabaptist Protestant or Anglican Protestant according to the confession that you ascribe to.

So I'm an Anglican Protestant. I'm also Orthodox and Catholic, right? Because I can still say the creeds. Being Anglican doesn't mean that you reject the creeds, right? It might in some circles, but not in mine.

[19 : 19] And in this era, there was still the assumption that church and state would work together for the common good. There was a tiny bit of separation.

Calvin tried to move his church a little away from the city authorities in Geneva, but effectively they were not overturning radically, that is the magistrate reformers, the assumption that church and state would work together.

So can you see that in this middle column Protestant believers have tried to supplement or clarify some issues that have remained uncertain or unclear from the early church?

Or if they hadn't remained unclear, they had nonetheless in the middle age been obscured by Roman Catholic teaching. So if you pause and hear your thoughts or your comments.

Yes. stop. Yeah, I think it's really important the point where they were, they destroyed the left-hand side of the column.

[20 : 40] Correct. And one of the arguments that I think Roman Catholics use against Lutherans is there was never a Lutheran before Martin Luther. Yes. There was never a Calvinist before John Calvin.

Yes. But they're trying to show that they were in lockstep with the early church. So they weren't schismatics. Instead, they were going back to the patristic church fathers and the understanding of grace and Christ that they taught.

Correct. But I think a lot of Protestants think that there was novelties and innovations and very Calvinist, very clear that he's going back to Augustine and the church fathers.

So I appreciate that. Well, the Reformation effectively was the rediscovery of Augustine, Augustine's doctrine of grace, which effectively means the rediscovery of Paul. So you're absolutely correct.

Luther did not see himself as a revolutionary. He just wanted to recapture something of the scriptural authority of the early church and to then hone what he believed was an era of the late medieval church.

[22 : 00] It's also true that there were lots of reformers through the middle ages and lots of people were complaining about the Roman church and the papacy, right? So Luther's not the first. The clever thing though about Roman Catholic church in the middle ages is that when there were people who were agitated for reform, the papacy let those folk become an order.

The Franciscans, the Dominicans, and of course a whole lot of others, the Benedictines. So they allowed the disagreement to stand but also contained the disagreement in order.

So it's a very, I don't mean this cynically, it's a very clever model, right? You're kind of allowing there to be this range of opinion but nonetheless this range of opinion is being cleverly circumscribed.

Suppressed. Yes, well no, they weren't being suppressed because they're allowed to exist, right? They're allowed to exist. And in fact, St. Francis was given amazing permission to preach whereas it was illegal if you were a lay person to preach.

St. Francis was a lay person and the Pope said, yeah, look, you're not going to say anything stupid so I'm going to let you preach. So they were allowed to do it, right?

[23 : 28] But it was kind of channeled perhaps is better than suppressed. Yeah, yeah. I've just written, no, I just haven't written. I've just translated a biography of St. Francis from German to English and so I'm willing to get people's wrong views of St. Francis right.

Why wasn't Lutheranism able to be channeled in that way? Oh yeah, sure. It sort of made its own little thing within the broader tent. Yes, because Luther was German.

Yes. So Luther did not live in central Italy.

He lived in Germany, had protection from his prince. His prince was able to deflect to some degree criticism. Although Luther was still not allowed to travel outside Saxony so he was limited into where he could go actually and he resented that massively because it was the young guys who were getting all the glory and not him and he hated that.

But so he was kind of constricted but he wasn't he wasn't burned. You mentioned at one point you said this talking about in the West this was happening.

[24 : 48] What's in the East? Are they developing in the same fashion looking at the Eastern Church? Is the East looking and investigating the same issues and coming in the same trajectory or was it a different experience?

Yes, thank you. No, it was quite a different experience because the Eastern Greek speaking church and the Western Latin speaking church had been growing apart for hundreds and hundreds of years and that movement apart was formalised in 1054 in the Great Schism.

So they're pretty different worlds at this stage. But are there theological issues still centred on grace?

Are there completely different things they're pondering in that church versus the West? Yes, thank you. Today you mean or in this period? In this period. Yeah, sure. I'm probably not qualified to speak about the 16th century Greek church but they did have a different view of the spirit so that probably did open them to having slightly different nuanced views of grace.

So we know why Lutheranism wasn't contained on the other side of the spectrum. Why wasn't the Cathari and the Adelgeni contained?

[26 : 11] You mean they were contained, right? Why were they absorbed? Yes. Yes, I see. Sure. Thank you. Thank you. So there were some groups in the south of France who were regarded as heretical and they were chiefly regarded as schismatic, ultimately heretical because they were refusing the Pope's authority.

Francis never did that. Francis looked for the Pope's authority. He submitted to the Pope's authority. He wanted to further the Pope's authority. So Francis was a man of the church.

he was pushing that the church should rethink its wealth, but he nonetheless was not a revolutionary like the Cathari and the Albigensians were.

In fact, the Pope, Francis lived at the same time as the other groups, and the Pope liked Francis because he was saying, look, here's a guy who can want to reform the church and he's loyal to me.

So Francis was the example opposite at the very same moment the Cathari and the Albigensians in the south of France.

[27 : 32] Rob? Just with that statement you just made, you implied that there might be a little politics involved. Who would have thought? Who would have thought? And then to go back to the theme you just mentioned earlier about returning back to the original theme of Paul and Augustine and all of these things, we kind of used the Holy Spirit to bring us to that place and to bring us to the present.

Is that a fair assumption that it's we're getting back to the core? We need to get back to the core issues. And that's where it separates the reformed from the true Catholic Italian church.

So it's kind of an odd question but I don't know if I'm getting my idea across of how the Spirit is now leading more in these reformers' thoughts.

Yes, so I assume that the Spirit's always at work amongst Christians. That is, that there's no moment when the Spirit gives up on us. So it is true though that Calvin wrote a lot about the Spirit and that's Calvin's way of writing a lot about grace.

My assumption is that grace is the personal presence of the Lord. A gift to you. God gives, not just gives this other thing to you, he gives himself to you, he gives himself to us.

[29 : 00] That's grace, God's personal presence to us. And how does God give to us his personal presence? Well, it's from the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus by his Spirit.

So, implicit in the Reformation's conversations about grace is a belief, a commitment to the doctrine of the Spirit. Calvin writes about a lot, Luther, Lesto, but still, in a sense, the understand, description, conversation of the Spirit probably awaits the Great Awakening a couple of hundred years after this moment.

Thank you. Well, let's look at the third column then. I would have thought, 2,000 years in the first 25 minutes.

The Reformers talked up the doctrines of grace and therefore the doctrine of the church.

What's the church for? If this is what grace is, what's the church had to look like to do to prosper that view of grace? stone. They summarised their beliefs, they had lots of them of course, but we might sloganise them in Christ for us, and they wrote down their views slightly different from different denominations in confessions of the faith.

[30 : 36] Confessions aren't meant to be held universally by all Christians. Confessions are written for particular denominations. And if you believe or agree with one of those confessions of faith, you can describe yourself as a Reformed Christian or an Anabaptist Christian or an Anglican Christian or something.

The assumption still was a church estate working together for the common good. But given that, 200 years later, Protestant churches were dead.

Protestant churches lacked life. You can be entirely Protestant and entirely dead. This was blowing people's minds.

They believed that Christ is for us. They believed that the church's job was to present the gift of Christ, Christ's personal presence to the world.

But still, this did not lead, in many quarters, to a vibrant, personal, piety. You can talk about a close walk with the Lord, but that doesn't mean you have a close walk with the Lord, right?

[31 : 53] So, in this period, the 18th century, beginning, perhaps all before as well, Christians started talking more about the doctrine of the Spirit and being driven by the Spirit into mission.

They agreed with the stuff the early church had spoken about in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of Christ. Of course, they agreed with that. And they agreed with the Protestant Reformers about the nature of grace and the nature of the church.

But they needed, as it were, another layer or level on top of those two earlier levels to specify, to clarify a smaller number of doctrinal confusions.

So, these Christians of the 18th century, we might call them the revivalists or something, started preaching heavy-handedly the doctrine of regeneration or Christ in us.

they believed, of course, with the early church that Christ is with us. And of course, they believed with the Reformation leaders that Christ in his death and resurrection is for us.

[33 : 12] They just believed that we needed to, we'd lost, we need to remind ourselves, we need to focus again on what it means that Christ can be in us. A healthy directive.

It's unhealthy if you've forgotten that Christ is with us and that Christ is for us. That can be a very unhealthy kind of Christianity. But Christ in us, when it assumes Christ with us and Christ for us, can be a very healthy kind of Christianity.

It becomes a renewal movement within the Protestant churches. The folk who might have been leading the evangelical revival, people whose names you might have heard of, John Wesley, George Whitfield, John Edwards, Christians, and so on.

When they wanted to capture, to summarize, to defend this new belief, they did not write more creeds. We had enough of them. They did their job.

They helped us understand that Christ is with us. Nor did they write confessions of faith, describing grace in the church. They had no real issue with the way the Protestant churches had defined grace or the church.

[34 : 26] Now, they decided if you want to highlight the close presence of the Lord, if you want to highlight Christ being in us, then you need to actually sing songs and write letters.

Those were the chief strategies that the revivalists used to defend this close walk with the Lord. If you want to defend the close walk with the Lord, why don't you use emotions and sing songs and talk about your close walk with the Lord?

It's much more difficult to defend and promote a close walk with the Lord if you decide you've got to write a 75 chapter confession of faith. And of course, we still know and sing some Wesley hymns or hymns by Isaac Watts.

They're glorious, and I hope that the church in the West continues to sing them. But the evangelical revivals also were great letter writers.

And this is a period which common people could write letters. Formerly, there had always been letters, right, written by generals or diplomats or monarchs.

[35 : 43] But now, common people, if you will, could write letters from my heart to your heart and encourage you in your own personal walk with the Lord, individually, specifically.

John Newton, the converted slave trader, was a magnificent correspondent. If you ever get a chance to read Newton's letters, you'll be amply rewarded. They're just beautiful pieces describing soul concerns.

In these days, well, this is how the postal service worked in the American colonies. You could write a letter and you'd take it to the postman who delivered it.

And the person receiving the letter had to pay for the stamp. So they realised that wasn't going to work, so they flipped it, right? The person sending the letter had to buy the stamp.

Now, of course, the Boston Post Road, not very far from here, was a great, viaduct for letter writing in the American colonies. Now, if you agree with a Charles Wesley hymn, or if you read John Newton's letters and you think, yeah, that's my understanding of a walk with the Lord, you can describe yourself as an evangelical Christian.

[37 : 02] So, personally, I'm an Orthodox Christian, as I can say the creeds. I'm an Anglican, or I'm a Reformed Protestant Christian, and I'm an evangelical Christian, because I believe that you need to work hard to promote and encourage and defend a personal walk with the Lord.

I understand that this word is highly contested, and in American politics more than perhaps where I'm from. But as an historical term, I think it's worth defending.

We give it up, that's okay, you don't have to use the word. But what other word are you going to use to describe the distinctions of the 18th century revivals and their defense of a personal experience of the Lord's work, right?

You've got to find, that's a long mouthful. I think I'm going to stick with the word evangelical. But this is also a weird period because at this point, the church and state are now moving apart.

Christendom is no longer assumed. The American Revolution, the French Revolution see to it that church and state no longer work together for the common good.

[38 : 12] And that does free Christians to some degree to think again about the spirit and mission and what it means to represent the Lord, what it means to encourage a personal walk with Christ under those new kind of strange conditions after perhaps 1,200 years of church and state working together for the common good.

I think we need to recapture all three moments. I'm not advocating that you choose one of these. I'm personally advocating that we commit ourselves to each of these.

That's sometimes a little bit difficult. That is, there's sometimes some pinch points because you take that reformed view and it might seem to undermine that evangelical position or you take that evangelical position and it might seem to undermine that creedal commitment.

So it's not always an easy ask for me to say why don't we aspire to capture all three moments. But I think it is the healthiest, most faithful Christian combination.

Christian Christian was in Manhattan just before the Second World War at Union Seminary. This was his observation of American Christianity. It's Protestantism without the Reformation.

[39 : 42] What he meant by that was that people were keen to stress your individual right to read the scriptures according to your own light, according to your own conscience. But he thought that American Christianity had lost something of the middle column.

You're in a better position to judge that than I am. But I think it's one of those interesting observations. The church I preached there took a wedding out recently in Melbourne. It's more kind of a Pentecostal church.

And above the table at the front of the church the slogan was Christ in us. And I'm pretty passionately committed to Christ in us preaching and experiencing it.

My fear in that church was that it was detached from Christ with us or Christ for us as more extreme Pentecostal churches might in their tradition experience.

So some questions? So I realize I'm about to step out of your area of expertise.

[40 : 55] But since you already mentioned Pentecostal, in 1901 the Azusa Street revival was a different sort of revival don't you think? From the one we see in the third column.

And so did a new formative period begin more or less with 1901. So I'd argue that Pentecostalism is a subset of the third column.

Oh. So it has some distinctives movements. But it's still basically a movement that's trying to defend and promote a close walk with the Lord.

An experience of the Lord in your heart. A commitment to believing that God's power is available to you today.

So I think, I'm not a Pentecostal Christian, so I have some theological disagreements, but I still think, as it were, they're our cousins. I often say kissing cousins, but I don't think that's a phrase people use anymore.

[42 : 01] Perhaps it's not appropriate in church circles. I have lots of Pentecostal students at Ridley, about a third of my students are Pentecostal, so I see them falling within this category.

In the post-modern West, the church here in America where we are prone to consumerism and there's so many different options of churches that we can attend, and we reject certain teachings based on our own individual preferences, and the temptation that comes with inward focus rather than hourly looking to Christ, him being with us, being for us, being in us.

Is there like, maybe Bonhoeffer hit a nail on the head, but we've lost the middle column, but are there practices that church can learn from church history to guard against some of the excesses of being so inwardly focused rather than being grounded and anchored in the scriptures creatures and creeds.

It's more of like prognostication and diagnosis of our current moment. Yeah, sure. So your question was, what can we say about curing all the ills of the church?

So next week I'm back. What I'm doing is looking at the third column and the way the third column has gone through three different moments since the 18th century.

[43 : 52] That might give us a few more clues. I think you're right. When people, we can look back and say how dumb they were, why didn't they see that in the scriptures, whatever.

My students often say to me, in a hundred years time, what will people look back at us and say? And I think they'll say, how could they be so individualistic? What was going on?

What were they smoking? This was their kind of ridiculousness. thinking pattern, right? And we are. Yeah, yeah. How do we, well, we start correcting that by good teaching what the church is for, because the church is one of the best places for unlearning individualism and learning how to be flourishing human beings in community.

So perhaps the now ecclesiology gets towards that. Yes, brother? Yes. I have a question about sort of Bonhoeffer's assessment of church in the Americas.

Because I believe he also wrote in about some of the churches that he visited during his time here in New York. And there was one African-American church that he visited.

[45 : 11] He wrote about how lovely it was, how the soulfulness, and the singing of the hands, people being moved. And so I think that was something that really inspired him when he had returned to Germany.

Yeah. So he visited the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, which is very attended, not very far away from Union Seminary. and he'd never known the kind of joy in the face of oppression that he saw there.

But notice what he's describing really is their close walk with the Lord. the way that African-Americans who were facing kind of enormous social impediments nonetheless together could see a future for themselves in the United States.

So his positive comment is still kind of about their evangelical credentials, right? And you're right, when he went back to Germany, he got his seminarians to listen to African-American spirituals.

he played on the record player because he was strung to how to help them walk closely with the Lord and their music, he believed, would help his...

[46 : 30] Well, his basic argument was African-Americans in the United States were learning to resist what they saw as a racist country, and he wanted his seminarians to resist the racism of the Hitler dictatorship.

So he thought that the lesson from Abyssinian Baptist Church might apply his own context. We've got one or two minutes, so perhaps that's one question with a not so long answer.

Well, in the Reformed period and the evangelical period, I think I know what you're going to say here, but are there common texts that are preached or commentaries written on?

Is there a kind of a book or two of scripture that is really representative of the Reformed era, really representative of the evangelical era, do you think? classically, you can find lots of the distinctives of Protestant Christianity in the Book of Romans, of course.

Luther rediscovered grace by reading through, preaching through Romans. For the evangelical revivalists, Romans played a part, but it was more one John. one John had amazing power in the Great Awakening, in the Earth amongst the revivalists.

[47 : 52] It talks about the spirit, it talks about the subjective evidences for a close walk with the Lord.

It talks about loving your neighbour. It talks about, yeah, anyway, lots of different things. That's a journal article I'd like to write one day, but it's still unfolding in my mind. Thank you.

I think we'll call it quits so they can reset for Sunday school.